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1. Northern Ireland group SEAT report a strong majority local Council vote on 21st September to object to the North-South Interconnector. After presentations from SEAT and from the industry group SONI, Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon Council voted roughly 18-5 in favour of objection. SEAT had referred to the dismantling of pylons in Snowdonia and other scenic areas.
2. The application in Northern Ireland for the North-South Interconnector is confusing. The original application from 2009 still stands, with the original planning application number O/2009/0792/F, despite the subsequent hearing being adjourned in some chaos. A new application, number O/2013/0214/F, was made in 2013 for “associated works”, not for the new line itself. These two applications seem to be taken together as covering the new (modified) line and associated works. Yet many substantial changes have been made to the proposal in the 2008 application. SEAT report that some 26% of towers have been moved outside the original application area, 27% moved closer to residential properties, the line has moved up to 150 m in places, and the original “red line” covering the area of the power line has not only been extended but has been replaced by a new different line in 25 locations. What this seems to mean is that many now-affected people may have missed the opportunity to take part in early-stage consultations and in the initial response to the principal application.
3. A further complaint against the Northern Ireland part of the North-South Interconnector is its apparent omission from the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of electricity infrastructure in Northern Ireland. There is the statutory Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) but this is a more specific matter than the SEA, which has a bearing on need and might envisage wider alternatives to the particular project.
4. The Irish-Scottish Links on Energy Study (ISLES) is a joint initiative between the three partner governments of Scotland, Ireland and Northern Ireland. [Publication](#) of final reports on 18th September marks the completion of the second phase of the ISLES project. The vision is for offshore wind farms to be connected by an offshore grid which itself would ultimately be integrated with the onshore grids, serving two purposes: connecting the wind farms to markets and being part of an integrated transmission interconnection system. These ideas are still at the formative policy stages without clear geographic proposals beyond the existing piecemeal connections. Sensibly developed, they should help relieve on-shore transmission.
5. A new [National Infrastructure Commission](#) (NIC) in the UK was announced October 5th at the Conservative Party conference. This may be a political move to distance the government from development decisions unpopular with its supporters. The opposition Labour Party had also [investigated](#) the idea of such a Commission. The new NIC will focus on need and priorities, within a 30-year horizon and reviewed every 5 years, in contrast with the short-lived Infrastructure Planning Commission a few years ago. The NIC may replace or complement the Treasury unit “[Infrastructure](#)”

[UK](#)”, and perhaps be more open about establishing need. It remains to be seen how well it engages with NGOs, communities and individuals.

6. The concept of infrastructure “need” has in the past been used to limit opposition to powerline projects. The idea was that a (claimed) “over-riding national need” should trump environmental impact and other objections. Need was seen as an absolute standing above, coming before and not to be frustrated by other aspects of a project. Further, the determination of “need” by national government could not be challenged at public inquiries or hearings. That position may be bureaucratically rigorous but it is hardly rational, since “need” bears varied definitions: technical, commercial, political, social and so on. Whose need is it? And how does it relate to alternatives, which may replace the proposed project by something radically different? However strong the need, in all eyes, if a project is unaffordable it won’t happen; that puts the claimed absoluteness of need into perspective. So it is not surprising that “need” is often a matter of public concern.

7. I have some sympathy with the desire to stratify the decision-making process, so that generic matters are considered at a higher level rather than repeatedly argued at each individual project. “Need”, “undergrounding” and “health and EMF” have been such generic matters. Some larger UK project inquiries have split geographically to consider site-specific matters, while generic issues have been dealt with in common sessions. That stratification has been welcomed by all sides.

8. Stratification can go wrong at national level if the higher levels become secretive or relatively inaccessible to the public. Public consultation over the National Policy Statements (NPSs), to which Revolt contributed, led to some dissatisfaction with the process. Likewise the recent infrastructure planning consultations have raised public dissatisfaction. These consultations seemed open and substantial, yet sometimes remote and one-sided in that they are just consultations leaving the public feeling they are not being taken seriously. There is a legal concept of “meaningful participation” in many countries, used for example in employment law. National infrastructure consultations might benefit from being seen to follow this concept.

9. It is in practically everyone’s interests that national infrastructure projects should be co-ordinated at a high level, including co-ordination between transport, telecoms, gas and water works as well as electricity. The present rash of electricity grid proposals is considered at a national level for network integrity, but less so at the level of European supergrid possibilities with subsea HVDC. There are industry and government discussions of national and international strategies, but these are more remote from the affected public than are particular powerline proposals.

10. We commented this year ([news393](#)) on National Grid’s [FES](#) consultations, feeling that they were selling already determined conclusions (that would *not* be meaningful consultation). It is not easy to engage the public so far upstream in strategic considerations. It involves a wider range of expertise and it sketches out different energy scenarios rather than specific projects. Out of 300 FES consultation delegates (many foreign) in 2014, 288 were from industry, professions, (large) customers, government and regulators, with just 9 social interest groups (like NRPB and WWF) and 3 consumer groups (like Which?), and no community groups as such. The 2015

list was smaller but with more from politics and consultants. Perhaps the new NIC can help by engaging better with public groups.

11. German environmental post-grad Natalia Geng, in collaboration with Renewable Grid Initiative, asks if National Grid's simulations supporting their case for need are vetted independently. Few organisations have the capability or software to do this in detail, but it is possible to see if the results are reasonable given some knowledge of transmission and of the rules for stability and security. Revolt has checked some such calculations, at one time in collaboration with Powergen, who no longer exist. Ofgem should have some experienced members and should be able to check reasonableness, though in the early years of the privatised industry the regulator was said to be misled for example over financial valuations. But it is not clear to us what if any independent check or audit is routinely made. We hope that Ofgem and the new NIC will ensure effective audit of grid simulations and of other technical claims, as the absence of competent checks leaves the system vulnerable to abuse.

12. A prominent landowner member of Revolt in the 1990s, William Osborne, wrote to the Darlington and Stockton Times at the end of September about problems with compensation which undervalues land and is long delayed. The Yorkshire 400 kV line was applied for in 1991 and consented in 1998. Finally, after long negotiations, compensation was agreed with Willie by National Grid in 2014, but he says none has been paid to date. Otherwise Willie and Mary are keeping well. Their 20 acre conservation area is maturing nicely after 40 years and still hosts local school groups.

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